

James Cameron House
Main Street
Alexandria
Huntingdon County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5394

HABS
PA,
31-ALEX,
8-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

JAMES CAMERON HOUSE

HABS No. PA-5394

Location: The house is situated on the northwest corner of Main Street and the western borough boundary, Alexandria, Porter Township, Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner: Ron and Marilyn Dively.

Present Use: Single-family dwelling.

Significance: This substantial dwelling of modest Federal ornament reflects the typical houses constructed during Alexandria's early canal days: brick structure and a five-bay rectangular plan. Samuel Isenberg, a longtime carpenter, and his family occupied the house for nearly forty years.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: ca. 1833-36. The 1833 deed does not indicate a brick building on the property; the 1836 deed does.
2. Original and subsequent owners: The house faces south on Main Street with a 60' frontage, and extends back 200'. It is bounded on the east by a town lot and on the west by the borough's northwest boundary.

The following is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which the structure stands. Reference is to the Recorder of Deeds Office of the County of Huntingdon, Pennsylvania.

1807 Deed November 14, 1807, recorded in Volume UI, Page 12.

Elizabeth Gemmill, et al.

TO

John Gemmill, Jr.

1833 Deed October 2, 1833, recorded in Volume F2, Page 277.

Rebecca and Amelia Gemmill

TO

James Cameron.

1836 Deed March 23, 1836, recorded in Volume Z1, Page 229.

James Cameron

TO

John Bingham.

1846 Deed February 4, 1846, recorded in Volume F2, Page 278.

John Bingham
TO
Samuel Isenberg and Benjamin Cross.

1850 Deed March 29, 1850, recorded in Volume Y2, Pages 604-05.
Benjamin and Mary Cross
TO
Samuel Isenberg.

1889 Deed February 19, 1889, recorded in Volume Z3, Page 20.
Samuel Isenberg (Joseph Isenberg, executor)
TO
Antis Ellis.

1889-1941 A variety of owners occupied the building as a dwelling.

1941 Deed August 30, 1941, recorded in Volume V7, Page 391.
Martha R. Lockspeiser, et al.
TO
Benjamin F. and Theresa Dively.

1987 Deed October 26, 1987, recorded in Volume 208, Page 351.
Benjamin F. and Marlene K. Dively
TO
Ron L. and Marilyn B. Dively.

3. Original plans and construction: No original plans or drawings have been located. The house was originally built with modest Federal styling and five-bays on a center-hall plan. The two front rooms on either side of the hall usually served as a living room/parlor and a dining room, the rear two as a parlor and a kitchen; there is also a cellar fireplace that probably served as a winter kitchen. The second-story space consisted of four bedrooms.
4. Alterations and additions: Several additions have been made to the building over the years. One addition, covered with aluminum or vinyl siding, extends across the rear of the building; a small aluminum/vinyl-sided northeast corner addition has a door and window facing east. A fire ca. 1895 destroyed a stable and severely damaged the dwelling; the repair to the latter may have included altering the pitch of the roof and the window treatments.

- B. Historical Context: Both James Cameron and John Bingham were landowners. According to tax records, both men owned houses on the lot that eventually was deeded to Samuel Isenberg and Benjamin Cross. When Cross and Isenberg bought the property from John Bingham, it included two houses: one brick, one frame.

Several men named Samuel Isenberg lived in Porter Township at various times during the nineteenth century, so it is difficult to identify which one was a member of

the Alexandria community. According to the census records of 1850, 1860, 1870, and 1880, the most likely Samuel Isenberg was a carpenter in Alexandria; a Samuel Isenberg was also president of the Alexandria school board in 1856 (Africa, 431). The Isenbergs--"one of the largest families in the county" (Africa, 419)--were one of two families in Alexandria who constituted the bulk of the membership in the German Reformed Church (Isenberg, 21).

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The brick dwelling is built in a modest Federal style, with five bays across the double-pile, two-story facade.
2. Condition of the fabric: Fair.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The main, original block is 34' x 32' (1,088 square feet); the rear addition is 39' x 8' (312 square feet); and the small northeast corner addition is 5' x 12' (60 square feet).
2. Foundation: Stone.
3. Wall construction: Seven-course common bond brick with aluminum or vinyl siding on the frame additions.
4. Structural system, framing: Load-bearing brick.
5. Porches: The front porch is frame on masonry piers, with concrete steps on the east side leading to the wood deck; the wood balustrade has three square supports and Victorian gingerbread. This porch measures 16' x 6'. Another porch on the northeast corner of the wood-frame addition shelters a second door. It is a modern installation.
6. Chimneys: A rebuilt exterior brick chimney is located on the west gable end; a second exterior brick chimney is located on the west end of the rear addition.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The front door is a wood three-paneled door with a large, single-light transom. The original side door on the northeast corner of the structure also has a single transom window. A modern door is located under the northeast porch.
 - b. Windows: The facade features double-hung, one-over-one-light wood

sash. The west gable end is punctuated by four windows on the first and second stories, and two vents at the attic level. There are two windows on the rear facade in the east section of the second story. The east gable end has no windows. These windows were probably added after a ca. turn-of-the-century fire destroyed part of the dwelling.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Side gable covered with sheet metal and asphalt shingles.
- b. Cornice: Wood box cornice with 6" eaves.

C. Interior: The appearance of the interior is unknown except for some details gleaned from Huntingdon County Historic Society Survey forms. According to these studies, the cellar has a basement fireplace that is currently blocked off. The stairway from the cellar to the first floor is low and steep. The wall and ceiling finishes are plaster.

D. Site:

- 1. General setting: The James Cameron House is located on the westernmost edge of Alexandria, beyond which is a stream. To the south and east are residences; to the southeast is an old brewhouse that is now an apartment building; to the north is an extensive backyard 200' deep.
- 2. Outbuildings: A frame stable existed from 1900-09 until 1946, and prior to 1893 when it was probably one of several service buildings on the property.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Old views (in Hartslog Heritage, 65, 83).

B. Primary and unpublished sources:

Porter Township tax records, 1819 to 1859, Huntingdon County Historical Society.

Alexandria Borough tax records, 1859 to 1873, Huntingdon County Historical Society and Huntingdon County Courthouse.

Huntingdon County Deed Books and Probate Records, Huntingdon County Courthouse, Huntingdon, Pennsylvania.

Huntingdon County Tax Map -- Alexandria, 01-01-12.

Huntingdon County Historical Society survey sheets.

C. Secondary and published sources:

Africa, J. Simpson. History of Huntingdon and Blair Counties, Pennsylvania. Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1883.

Harshbarger, Jean P., Nancy R. Taylor, Sara H. Zabriskie, and F.R. Zabriskie. Hartslog Heritage. State College, Pennsylvania: K-B Offset Printing, Inc., 1975.

Isenberg, J.M.S. The Isenberg Family of Pennsylvania. Spring City, PA (No publisher given), 1900.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was conducted by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record in cooperation with the America's Industrial Heritage Project under the directorship of Randy Cooley; AIHP is an undertaking of the National Park Service, based in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania. Recorded under the direction of Robert J. Kapsch, chief of HABS/HAER, the project was completed during summer 1988 at the HABS field office in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Project leader was Alison K. Hoagland, senior HABS historian; field supervisor was Dorothy Burlingame, University of Vermont; project historian, Karen Genskow, Sangamon State University. Large-format photography is by David Ames. Editing of the final report was done by Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian.

This report was completed as part of a larger project documenting two canal towns--Saltsburg, on the Western Division of the Pennsylvania Mainline Canal, and Alexandria, on the Juniata Division--flanking the Allegheny Divide. Twenty-one reports on other buildings in Alexandria, an overview history of Alexandria (HABS No. PA-5407), and of canal town development in Pennsylvania (HABS No. PA-5666) are part of the HABS/HAER collection. Twenty-two reports on buildings in Saltsburg (Indiana County) and an overview history of Saltsburg (HABS No. PA-5438) are also available. Results of the project were published as Two Historic Pennsylvania Canal Towns: Alexandria and Saltsburg, Sara Amy Leach, editor (Washington, DC: Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, National Park Service, March 1989).